The Girl Who Had No God

A Romance of Treasure, "Conscience" and Love

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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CHAPTER I.

HILARY KINGSTON had been shot.

Old Hilary had been a familiar figure in the village of Woffingham for years. The eccentricity of his gray derby hat, his bristling gray brows, his always fresh gray gloves, his erect, rather heavy old figure, singled him out from the mass of commuters that thronged the city trains. The gray derby was a part of old Hilary. Except on those rare occasions when he attended service at St. Jude's he was never seen without it.

He lived on the hill above the village, with his daughter—had lived there for ten years. The Hall was beautiful, but old Hilary received no visitors, returned no advances. Visitors thought this curious. The villagers, prosperous business men with smart wives, shrugged their shoulders. The man's house was his own. If he found that he could do without the town, the town could get along with him.

There was no mystery about the Hall, and little curiosity. Cars going to the country club passed under the brick wall of its Italian garden. Their occupants sometimes caught a glimpse of Elinor Kingston there, reading in a rose arbor, wandering among her peonies and iris in the spring, or cutting sprays of phlox in midsummer.

The men thought her rather lovely; the women, odd, with her blond hair and dark eyes. The assistant rector of St. Jude's, new come to the village, met her face to face on one of his long country walks, a month or so before old Hilary's death, and could not forget her.

He led the conversation to her that night at a dinner.

"An exquisite face," he described her, "but sad, almost tragically sad."

"Blond?" The lady on his right was a Mrs. Bryant. In honor of the new assistant rector, who came of fine family and was a distinct acquisition to the village, she wore the Bryant pear shaped pearl. She spoke rather curtly. "I should not call her exquisite—but you probably met Elinor Kingston. Her sadness is a pose, I believe; she has everything she wants."

The assistant rector was young but very wise. So he spoke no more of Elinor until the women had left the table. Then he ventured again.

"Don't join the army of those of us who worship from afar," advised the youth who had moved up beside him. "She's the loveliest thing in this part of the country. But, except our sainted rector, no one ever gets to put a foot on the place It's exclusiveness to the nth power, and then some. There's a lot of talk, of course, or used to be. Old Kingston brings his servants from New York, and, except an elderly housekeeper, none of them speak English. They used to say around here that he was a refugee, but that's all rot. He's a stingy old dotard, afraid some handsome youth like myself will captivate the girl. That's all there is to it."

The assistant rector, whose name was Ward, smiled perfunctorily. Instead of the gleaming table, spread with flowers and candles, with the gay colors of cordials and liqueurs, he was seeing a girl standing at the turn of a country road and gazing down into the valley and the distant village with sombre eyes. . . .

Faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these is faith. Faith in ourselves, faith in those around us, and that sublimest faith of all which trusts in Something Beyond. To all men is given such faith at the beginning of life, and some keep it to the end. But here and there is one who has lost it, who cannot turn his eyes up and say, "Lord, Lord." Old Hilary had not kept the faith.

Years ago he had not been evil. He had gone from philosophy into unbelief, that route which all must travel. But, unlike the many, he had not come back.

He had started with Socialism, but Socialism must be founded on the Christ, and Him he scorned. So from Socialism he had drifted to anarchy. To rob the rich and give to the poor, at first. Later on, to rob the rich, to incite seditions, to arm the rebellious—oh, it was comprehensive enough, vastly wicked with that most terrible lawlessness of all, that believes itself law.

To pit his wits against the world and win—that had been old Hilary's creed. "For the oppressed" had been at first the slogan of the band he gathered around him. "Against the oppressor" it became later on. Vastly different the two. Most of human charity and kindliness lay crushed down and trampled underfoot during old Hilary's progress from Christ to Antichrist.

The band had been gathered with much care. Respectability, order decorum—these spelled safety to old Hilary's astute mind. Most of them were younger sons of English landed families, with a sprinkling of the other nationalities. Young Huff was an Australian, for instance, the son of a wealthy sheep-owner. Boroday the Russian—implicated in the bomb-throwing that destroyed the minister of war—was a nobleman. Old Hilary had got him out of Siberia during those early days when he righted what, to his crooked mind, were wrongs.

There were twelve in the band at the beginning, and for five years there were no changes. Then came the kidnapping and holding for ransom of Mackintosh the banker in Iowa, and the unexpected calling out of the State militia. The band had hidden Mackintosh in a deserted mine and three of the band went down in the shooting that followed his discovery. In the looting of Tiffany's vaults, which has never been published, a Frenchman named Dupres was killed; and only recently a tire had burst after the holding up of the car of the Governor of Delaware, and their car, overturning, had crushed Jerrold, the mechanic of the band and old Hilary's chauffeur. One way and another, there were only five left: Talbot and Lethbridge the Englishmen, Boroday, Huff and old Hilary himself. And old Hilary's hour was almost come.

Old Hilary lived well, as he might. His foreign servants were artists. He liked good food, good wines, good books. He even had a few pictures—from the leading galleries of Europe. He hung them in the house at Woffingham, with a cynical smile.

"Safest place in the world," he said to old Henriette, who protested. "The village has never even heard of them!"

And so in this atmosphere with which he surrounded himself, of fine living and wrong thinking, of atheism raised almost to religion, of no law and no Christ, old Hilary had brought up his daughter. He had been proud of her in his way; absolutely selfish, too. She had no other companion. He taught her his unbelief, pointing out the churchgoers, as they drove together on Sunday mornings, as slaves to a myth. Also, he taught her to hate a lie, and to give alms. Early in her life their drives together had been punctuated with questions.

"But if my mother is dead, where is she?" asked Elinor on one of them.

Old Hilary had eyed her from under eyebrows that were already gray.

"She lives in the memories of those that knew and loved her."

"But I never knew her. Then for me she doesn't live! But Mademoiselle"—— she checked herself. Suspicion had been dawning in old Hilary's eyes.

"Death is the end," he said tersely, and quoted Darwin and Haeckel to her. But at the end of the drive he interviewed Mademoiselle, and sent her flying to her chamber, where from under the carpet beneath her bureau she got her rosary and wept over it.

Elinor was twenty the year her father died, a slender girl, fond of flowers, rather a dreamer. Well educated, too. Old Hilary had seen to that; she knew Malato, Haeckel, Bakunin; spoke French and Spanish—Hilary had spent much time in Central America helping the insurgents; it was he who financed the insurrection in Northern Mexico—and wrote fluently the form of shorthand that her father had devised as a means of communication between the leaders of the band. A keen-eyed, wistful-mouthed slip of a girl, shut off in the great house on the hill above Woffingham; living her life of big theories and small duties, calloused to robbery and violent deeds, and viewing wistfully from her windows the little children in the road below.

CHAPTER II.

ONCE a year the association closed its books. During all of the June before old Hilary's sudden death Elinor had been busy arranging figures, collecting data in the cryptic shorthand she knew. Then, on the 1st of July, Hilary gave his annual dinner.

The band, from twelve, was down to five. Boroday, the Russian, glancing around the table, shrugged his shoulders. It was the chance of the game they played, and percentages would be larger. Nevertheless there was a weight of depression over them all.

Elinor was at her father's right, simply dressed. The dinners were always a trial to her. She was palpitatingly anxious that the papers before old Hilary be in order and accurate. They were her work. The deeper significance of the meeting she was not so much ignorant of as profoundly indifferent to. If her father did a thing, it took on order, became law.

There were present Talbot and Lethbridge, the Englishmen; Boroday, whose rescue from Siberia had made him old Hilary's henchman; and young Huff. Huff was the mechanician. He had been trained in the Bleriot works; aeroplanes to wireless, automobiles to automatic pistols, he knew them—all makes, all grades. If old Hilary was the brains, Huff was the hands of the band.

He sat beside Elinor and watched her with worshipping eyes. Perhaps it was as well that old Hilary was intent on his food and on the business in hand.

The routine of the annual dinner seldom varied. Five of them then, that last dinner around the table, in evening clothes, well set up, spare, three of them young, all temperate, honorable about women—as polished, as harmless in appearance, as death-dealing, as the gleaming projectile of a 12-inch gun!

First old Hilary went over the books. It might have been the board meeting of some respectable bank. He stood at his end of the table, and the light from the chandelier fell full on him.

"I have to report, gentlemen," he would say, "a fairly successful year." This is where it differed from a bank. The association had had no bad years. "While our expenses have been heavy, returns have been correspondingly so." And so on, careful lines of figures, outlays and returns, to the end. For old Hilary was Secretary and Treasurer as well as President.

This time, when he had reached the end of what was to be his last report, he paused and cleared his throat.

"Unfortunately, that is not all, gentlemen. 'Nothing can we call our own but death.' And it is my sad duty to report, this last year, the loss of three of our number. A calamitous year, gentlemen."

He might have been a trustee, lamenting the loss of valued supporters to a hospital!

Afterward, in the library, with Elinor embroidering by the fire, they cashed in. They dealt only in cash. Securities were dangerous. Once or twice Boroday had successfully negotiated with a fence in Paris, but always under old Hilary's protest.

The routine never varied. Elinor unlocked the door to a winding staircase, which led to a basement room where the steel vault stood in its cement walls. The five went down, returning shortly with the cash boxes. The money was divided on the library table. It went by percentages. Hilary drew twenty that last year, each of the others ten—a total of sixty per cent. The forty per cent. remaining was divided, or sent as a whole, according to the sense of the meeting. Berlin got it all one year, for instance, to Boroday's disgust. Russia generally received a large proportion. The Chinese revolution, the defense of Berkhardt, who killed Ecker the pork-packer; a shipment of guns and ammunition to Central America—thus it went.

Although they preferred only money, now and then the loot included jewels. By common consent such gems, stripped of their settings, were put aside for Elinor. They meant nothing to her. Had any one told her that for several years her share had been greater in actual value than all the money that had fallen to her father she would not have believed it. . . .

Four days or so after the annual meetings the rector of St. Jude's was always asked to dinner. And although the reverend gentleman would under normal circumstances have been fishing in Canada, he never went until this function was over. For old Hilary, detesting his creed, respected the man. A certain percentage, then, of old Hilary's share went over the library table, after the dinner, to the rector.

"Use it where it will do the most good," he would say.

"The church organ"——

"Not a cent to the church organ! Buy the youngsters a playground, or—build a lying-in ward in the hospital."

Elinor's mother had died in childbirth.

The last check had been unusually generous. The rector, who had been smoking one of old Hilary's choice cigars, put it down and faced his host resolutely. It took courage.

"Mr. Kingston," he said "the church needs men like you. Why be a Christian in the spirit and—avoid the letter?"

"Tut." Old Hilary rose and looked down at him. "I am like all gamblers. This annual check to your poor is the sop I throw to luck. That's all, sir."

And his tone closed the discussion. The word "gambler" worried the rector. He thought over it on his way down the hill to the rectory. But his poor were very poor. He cashed the check the next day. . .

Elinor was in the library that sunny August day when they brought old Hilary to her. She had never seen death before, except on the streets of Mexico, and for a good many years he had been all she had—since her last governess, in fact, had been discovered secreting the rosary and had been word-scourged from the house in tears. She had fainted, and wrinkled Henriette laid her on a couch.

Boroday, the Russian, had brought the body home, and now he stood, looking down at Elinor and stroking his English-cut beard.

"He expected it, Henriette," he said. "He thought it would have come sooner, in the Parkar matter. I wonder"——

He glanced through the open door to the billiard-room, where old Hilary's body lay on the table. He was minded, was Boroday, to wonder many things—whether, after all, old Hilary's dauntless spirit had gone out like a lamp, or if——

This white and carven thing in the next room, with stiffening hands and the gray derby at its feet, surely there was no mystery about it. This was not old Hilary; that was all. But where then was old Hilary? The Russian, who had been raised within the pale and on an ancient faith, and who had now lost his best friend, felt all the bitterness of his unbelief.

Elinor stirred.

"He will have to be buried," said Henriette. "The news has gone through the town. The assistant rector of the church has telephoned, and is on his way here now. What am I to do?"

"Let them bury him as they will," said Boroday. "What does it matter? He would himself have seen the humor of it."

Hilary Kingston had been shot during the daylight robbery of the Agrarian Bank messenger. He was shot as an innocent bystander, and was referred to by the press as philanthropist and martyr. So much for years of caution and the annual gift to Saint Jude's.

As a matter of fact, the Agrarian affair was calamitous in several ways. It bore too close a resemblance to a St. Louis matter of several years back, in which Boroday had come under suspicion.

On a Tuesday morning, the cash being more than the bank cared to have about, $210,000 was sent to the Clearing House. Two clerks from the bank accompanied the messenger, who went by taxicab.

There are two direct routes to the Clearing House, one along one of the great avenues, the other through the newspaper district. Here, at 10.30 in the morning, things are rather quiet, and except for vans delivering rolls of paper, there is little traffic.

The taxicab went by this latter route. Opposite the Record office, where the presses stood, silent monsters waiting to leap, old Hilary Kingston was standing, kid gloved and wearing the gray derby hat he affected. As the taxicab bore down toward him he hailed it.

"Taxi!" he called.

The taxicab slowed down. Old Hilary, seeing it occupied, waved it off with his stick. But it had come to a full stop. There was an alleyway beside the Record building, and now three men ran out from there, and thrust revolvers through the open windows of the cab. After that it was hot work. Marshall of the bank went back with a bullet through his lung. The bank messenger fired pointblank, and missed his target; but old Hilary, gray derby and all, went down where he stood, twenty feet away. The uninjured clerk had an automatic gun, and swept a circle with it over the bag which lay at his feet. There was no getting inside that ring of death. The bandits retreated, firing as they ran, and climbed into an automobile up the street. When the reporters in the Record office wakened to the fact that there was a story under their windows, the street was clear. Only old Hilary lay dead on the pavement, with a bullet in his head.

The chauffeur of the taxicab drove madly to the hospital with Marshall, who was dying, and then to police quarters, where he gave himself up. He was released, of course. His name was Walter Huff. He was shown to be a new man, but sober and industrious, one of the best drivers in the employ of the taxicab company. It was also shown that Hilary Kingston had hailed him; Huff explained his stopping. Mr. Kingston was a regular patron; he had meant to tell him that in five minutes he would come back and pick him up.

Huff was under surveillance for three days. His conduct was impeccable.

CHAPTER III.

IT was, after all, the assistant rector of St. Jude's who came up the hill that hot August day. The news of old Hilary's death had come down from the city on an early train. The rector was away on his deferred fishing trip, where, having exchanged his clerical collar for none at all and having blistered the end of his ecclesiastical nose he was quite happy.

The assistant, Mr. Ward, whistled as he climbed the hill. As the hill was steep, this proved two things—his youth and his lightness of heart. True, old Hilary Kingston was dead, and violently done to death. But to Mr. Ward death was but the gateway to a larger life; and only very sad in the young, who have not yet lived.

Mr. Ward was young, a broad-shouldered young man, with clear, rather deep-set eyes and a firm mouth. The people of St. Jude's prophesied that the world would hear of Mr. Ward. There was only one bar to his progress: he had too much humor. It seemed to the people of St. Jude's that religion is a serious thing, forgetting that good cheer is one of the things it must bring, an it be religion.

So Mr. Ward climbed the hill and whistled. One may think while whistling. He thought of the cricket club, and of the injustice of his arrest the day before for speeding his car. From that to old Hilary's French machine, and a wonder if it would be sold now—and so to Elinor. He was young and vigorous, and Elinor's face had been but a temporary obsession. Nevertheless, as he approached the house his heart beat a little faster. Boroday met him in the hall. Old Hilary was upstairs by that time, lying in his great bed. All the doors and windows were open, and sunshine filled the rooms. Ward thought it an unusually sane house of mourning.

"I'm glad to see the sun," he said. "So many people close things up."

"Miss Kingston wished things undisturbed."

"I came up to tell her—but I suppose she doesn't care to see any one—the rector is away on a holiday. I'll wire him, of course."

Boroday led the way into the library where the rector had so recently received his check. He turned and eyed Ward.

"Why bring the rector back?" he asked. "It is a little late for—the comforts of religion."

"Mr. Kingston gave lavishly to the church. whatever the church can do"——

"I rather think," said Boroday politely, "that he gave, not to the church, but to the poor."

"'Inasmuch as ye give unto one of the least of these,'" Ward replied, and returned Boroday's gaze.

Elinor had pulled herself together. By the one standard that had ruled her life she acted now—her father's wishes.

Ward, brought face to face with her, found her unapproachable, calm, almost cool. Found her very lovely, too, and let his ardent young eyes rest on her oftener than was wise. Her situation appealed to him. She seemed to be quite alone, save for the Russian with the beard.

"If I can do anything," he said, "wire to your relatives—anything of that sort"——

"I have no relatives. My mother died when I was born. I—I have a curious feeling that everything in the world has stopped—as though I'd reached the end of things."

It seemed to Mr. Ward that he should offer some of the comfort of his faith to this shrinking, wide-eyed girl before him. But what? Rumors had come to him, of course.

"Death is only a tragedy when we think of it as an end and not as beginning," he said. "It is always sad. I hope you understand that I know how terrible all this is for you. But to have lived one's life, active and well and useful to the end, and then to depart, in the fulness of days, for new activities—somewhere else"——

Elinor shivered in the warm sunshine.

"You see," she said drearily, "I do not believe those things. I should like to just now." Then, almost defiantly: "He was useful. You will never know the things he did that were helpful. But perhaps we would not agree on that, either."

The Russian was walking up and down the hall, impassive, watchful. Under his stoical indifference, he was suffering tortures. A bullet from the automatic had gone through his left arm grazing the bone. Luckily, the bullet was not in the wound. Henriette had bathed and cleansed it, but he was in agony. He was suffering pain, bereavement, defeat. His face expressed only decorous and conventional regret.

Now and then he glanced in at the library door, but generally he watched the road up the hill. As he had watched the Church ascending, so now at any time might come Law. He would be prepared.

He had grown a beard since the St. Louis matter. That would help. And he had waited to return and claim old Hilary's body, until the Record extra had announced his killing. Walking up and down the wide hall, his keen mind was going back, detail by detail, over the day. Talbot and Lethbridge in the car had kept on. They had had changes of clothing in the machine. By now they should be at the country club, and halfway around the links. The car, with its changed license plates, would be standing in the eminently respectable country club garage.

Ward had risen. He towered far above Elinor. Because of his heavy shoulders, he never looked his full height. Boroday, in the corridor, stole a moment from his anxieties to find the young clergyman every inch a man, and to throw him the grudging admiration of defeated middle-age for youth and vibrant life.

"Then I shall not send the rector?"

"Please, no."

"Is there anything at all that I can do?"

Elinor looked out at the corridor, where Boroday's restless eyes were once more on the road.

"Do the—the police know about this?"

"Surely. I suppose you have been told about what happened."

"They will tell me nothing."

There was a car coming up the hill. That would be it. Boroday eased his aching arm. He did not dare a swing, but the hand was thrust in the pocket of his coat. If only the hemorrhage did not start again! He braced himself and watched.

"It was a robbery, you know that," said Ward, in the library. He picked his words carefully. "As I got the story, a taxicab on its way to the bank was held up near the Record office. Your father had stepped to the curb to hail the taxi, and—it happened then, a—a stray bullet from one of the bandit's guns."

Boroday, eyes on the car, heard the statement, and, with the Chief coming up the steps from the road to the garden, took the time to repudiate it.

"Pardon me!" he said. "It was not a weapon in the hands of the bandits. It was the revolver of the bank messenger."

Ward turned in surprise. Boroday's eyes were fixed on Elinor's, with reassurance in their depths. The assistant rector was not subtle, but he had a curious feeling of something behind all this. He was uncomfortable.

"I trust," he said earnestly, "that these various outrages will be at an end now. Surely the police"——

"Possibly." The Anarchist's gaze wandered to the garden, where even then the Chief was making his way toward the house. "Of course, these bandits are trained men of unusual intelligence. If the police were of intelligence to cope with them"——

"Yes?"

"They would not be on the force, at meagre salaries and petty graft. They would be"—he shrugged his shoulders—"bandits themselves, very possibly."

Ward left after that—left with an uncomfortable feeling of having got nowhere. He was convinced of one thing: death, which for him was an open gateway, was for this girl a closed and fastened door. And he knew something else. No other woman had ever so profoundly impressed him as this girl who without hope in her grief met it with a high head and courageous eyes.

He found a certain comfort, in one thing. Elinor had made a concession, and Hilary Kingston, lavish giver to the parish poor, was to be buried from St. Jude's.

The Chief met Mr. Ward on the terrace and took off his hat. Boroday, in the dim hall, felt a certain sense of content. Nothing could have been more auspicious, could have set his stage better for his little drama, than the presence of the young clergyman. The whole scene gained tone, decorum.

The Chief's visit was short. They had followed the bandits' car and lost it, and finding himself in the neighborhood——

"Be assured," he said to Elinor, in his best manner, "that we'll not rest until this thing is cleared up. The community"—he cleared his throat—"the community will not lose one of its best citizens without a violent protest."

With the coroner he went up the stairs and into old Hilary's room. The Chief glanced about while the hasty examination was being made.

"Nice room," he said. "But a jolly lot of good it does the old gentleman now! Nice little girl downstairs, too. I've seen that chap in the hall somewhere."

The coroner drew the sheet up over Hilary's peaceful face.

"The preacher? They all look alike. It's the vest and the collar."

"The other man, with the accent. German, I take it, or—Russian."

Boroday was waiting for them at the foot of the staircase. In the library was a tray, with drinks and sandwiches. The shades had been lowered.

The Chief ate and drank. And as often as he raised his glass he looked at the Russian over it. At last:

"Haven't we met somewhere Mr.——"

"Boroday. I rather think not."

"You remind me of some one—I'll place you, or the person you resemble, pretty soon. I have a slow mind. It's like an Airedale dog: it's a long time getting started, but when it begins it hangs on like the devil."

The drinks were cold, and the house cool. The prospect of starting out in the heat and dust did not allure the two men. Sitting there at his ease, the Chief ran over the points of the outrage.

"In several ways," he observed comfortably, "the affair resembles one that happened in St. Louis several years ago. There's the same quality of audacity—and there are other things."

Quite suddenly a light came into his eyes.

"Ah!" he said, bending forward toward Boroday. "I told you I'd get it. It was in St. Louis I saw you!"

Their glances clashed, the Chief's intent, the Russian's cool, amused.

"The dog," said Boroday, "holds on well, but—to the wrong throat."

"You have never been in St. Louis?"

"Never."

CHAPTER IV.

ELINOR lived alone after the funeral. Henriette, who had now a chance to practise her favorite vice of thrift, was for sending away the other servants.

"I can manage," she said. "For all you eat"——

But Elinor protested.

"I shall want to keep up the Saturday dinners. Let things stay as they are for a time."

It had been old Hilary's custom to have such members of the band as were available dine with him of a Saturday.

Henriette raised her hands.

"Things are changed," she cried. "You are alone here now. To have those four men"——

"That is better than having one man, Henriette."

(To Be Continued.)

HOW TO LOOK FOR A JOB

Illustrated by WILL B. JOHNSTONE

By Hazen Conklin

A New EVENING WORLD SUCCESS MOVIE, Illustrating the RULES of the "ROAD TO SUCCESS."

First of all, it is well to know what kind of a job you will best fit into. Study yourself—your ambitions—your natural aptitude. Decide what you believe you could do BEST.

Arm yourself with references from people who know you well, people who stand well in the community. Have them express their opinion of your character, habits, trustworthiness and industry.

Read the "help wanted" columns of the newspapers. Do not be discouraged if you do not at first find an opening suited to your purpose. The very "ad" you are looking for may be in the paper on the very day you miss looking for it.

Or, if you can afford to do so, advertise for a job. State briefly your qualifications for the job desired and that you can furnish references. Be sure your "ad" is worded grammatically and sounds business-like.

Another way is to in person visit business houses which employ young men in the line you desire to enter. It is well to know the name of the person who employs the help and to ask directly for him.—*Tomorrow, "How to Apply for a Job."*